

Preface

The story of the U.S. Corps of Engineers in the Pacific Northwest is remarkable, full of exciting and noteworthy engineering and human achievements. The taming of the mighty Columbia River, from early navigation improvements of the 19th century to the multiple-purpose dams of the 20th century, represents a major accomplishment. The jetties on the coastal harbors and at the mouth of the Columbia and the Willamette River Basin flood control and multiple-purpose reservoirs also reflect significant engineering deeds. All of these projects helped promote the growth and economic development of the region. For over 100 years, the Corps successfully applied technological and engineering expertise to the problem of water resource development in the Pacific Northwest. Above all, the history of the Portland District of the Corps of Engineers is a story of men and women challenging and transforming the natural environment to make it serve man's needs.

It is impossible to cover comprehensively all of the activities of the Portland District over the past 110 years. This narrative is an effort to sketch the main outline and give a basic account of how the Corps dealt with the most important problems and challenges it faced in the Northwest. The history of the district falls into 55 year segments. During the first period, the Corps functioned as a rivers and harbors district, largely devoted to navigation projects. In the next time portion, it focused on multiple-purpose projects whose chief object centered on providing hydropower and flood control. During the latter period, the district shifted from a structural problem-solving approach to a more balanced project and water resource management and planning role. I have tried to show and explain the causes and consequences of this transformation in mission. My basic goal has been to describe what the Corps accomplished and how and why it functioned as it did. Whenever possible I have let the various district engineers speak for themselves, quoting from their reports and correspondence. In this fashion, I hope the flavor of the times and personalities of the individual district engineers comes to life. Finally, I have attempted to place the engineers' activities within the context of the economic growth and development of the Pacific Northwest and to appraise their contribution to it.

No work of this sort is solely the product of one individual, though I alone remain responsible for its contents. My research and writing was assisted greatly by staff members of the Portland District; David Piff of the Federal Archives and Record Center in Seattle, Washington; the staffs at the National Archives, Washington, D.C. and at the Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland; and Audrey Moody of the Oregon Historical Society. I owe a special thanks to Frank Schubert of the Historical Division, Office of the Chief of Engineers, for his careful reading of the manuscript and helpful suggestions which improved its clarity. This study covers the history of the Portland District to May 1980.